

# **Playing your 'Cards' Right – Vittiya Saksharta Abhiyaan (VISAKA)**

For ages, literacy in rural households in its most rudimentary and exclusive definition has meant the ability of creating personal signatures on paper. India's government, however, has been aiming to add a new dimension to this basic definition- eLiteracy! The government hopes to introduce digital literacy to at least one member of the 147 million poor households in our country by the year 2020. India, already being in the disadvantage because of abject poverty and brutally widespread corruption has a daunting war to face. Nonetheless, the government climbed the first stair in faith and presented our country with a shrouded boon, i.e., demonetization.

The presence of the huge gap between the production of goods and services and their delivery gives an opportunity to wandering deceivers who look to satisfy their avarice for money. Everyday Indians would agree that taking steps towards promoting digital literacy could lead to the closure of this gap, inclusive growth and transparency.



The department of Electronics and Information Technology of the Indian Government launched the NDLM (National Digital Literacy Mission) on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, 2014. The mission was launched to spread mass digital literacy. Under this pursuit, about 52.5 lakh people, including Angadwadi and ASHA workers will be digitally trained. NGOs, Industries, government authorized centers, common services centers and authorized educational institutions are being used to train the beneficiaries on IT literacy.

Our Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, is a firm believer in the benefits of the interconnectedness of the digital world. He believes that dispatching resources or money to far-flung villages don't have to be dire tasks anymore. These places can easily receive money by the click of a finger, free from the mercenary 'officials' at each stage. A child in a remote village can have better access to education and a farmer could be blessed with better market price. The Prime Minister recognizes the efforts of a man in Haryana, who brought

international attention to the discrimination and prejudices still practiced against the girl child through “selfie with daughter”. Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that about 180 million new bank accounts were opened, funds for the unbanked were introduced and insurance was brought to the reach of the poorest when digitization was adopted by the government as a significant, auto-catalytic developmental strategy. A group of farmers in Maharashtra who use a Whatsapp group to share farming ideas is a charming example of how digitization is for the poor and their empowerment.

Our Prime Minister believes that despite the ups and downs of achievements and tragedies, the digital age offers unimaginable opportunities to transform the lives of millions of people. In a country with 800 million youth under 35 years of age, brimming with hope and leading transformative movements, it is possible to touch the lives of the poorest and weakest in this digital age of interconnectedness. Prime Minister Narendra Modi hopes to be able to make the government more transparent, accountable, accessible and responsive through E-governance. An app, the Narendra Modi Mobile app, looks into the feedbacks and constructive criticisms submitted by the citizens of the country on a regulatory basis.

Many significant steps have been taken towards digitizing India. Broadband connection increases every year and the government aims to be able to digitally connect all 1.25 billion citizens of the country. The expansive and effective National Optical Fiber Network aims to connect 600,000 villages with broadband. Teaming up with Google, the government hopes to manifest Wifi-hotspots in 500 railway stations. Information, education, skills, healthcare, livelihood, financial inclusion, small and medium village enterprises, opportunities for women, conservation of natural resources, distribution of clean energy will become a bountiful reality with digital India. Even though the challenges may be many, the government seems to be determined

to take decisive steps towards development, walking hand-in-hand with the relevant rules of today's world.

Vittiya Sakshatra Abhiyan is a riveting campaign adopted by higher educational institutions to directly participate in the making of digital India. Under this campaign, volunteers are sent out to spread education on digital literacy. The ministry allows these institutions to submit daily updates on their contribution. The HRD minister, Mr. Prakash Javedkar has visited several such institutions to inaugurate the Digital Literacy Campaign, Manipal University being one of them.



The Digital Literacy Campaign launched by Manipal University had four stages. The Campaign commenced with the training of student volunteers by around 50 teachers of the University. Shopkeepers and vendors around the city were taught how to perform digital transactions by four methods – Cards (PoS), e-Wallet, USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) and Aadhar Cards around various places in Manipal like Tiger Circle. Around 500 people were made aware of the working of digital transactions and management at MIS.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 2016, the student volunteers went ahead with creating an interactive PowerPoint presentation to promote digital literacy the moment they were notified by the UGC. The presentation incorporated the rudimentary and introductory basics of IT literacy. They explained the advantages, methods, requirements and challenges of this campaign in a concise manner. The presentation introduced people to the elementary and reliable methods of digital cash management. Apart from the presentation, a publicity poster was created to promulgate the idea of 'less-cash' in Manipal. Many volunteers signed up to the VSO to be a part of this transformative campaign.





The volunteers registered at the MHRD website and were assigned the task of educating at least twenty people each on the different methods of digital cash transactions. The pdf files sent by the MHRD were mainly used, going according to the fundamental guidelines laid down by the ministry. For the benefit of the general people in Manipal, the pocket guide was translated into a Kannada Audio-Visual. The Volunteer Services Organization of Manipal University aided the campaign with its volunteers. The whole town was brimming with activity as VISAKA awareness programs were being held in a diverse number of locations from MMMC (22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2016), DOC (23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2016) to SOIS (6<sup>th</sup> January, 2017). Hundreds of people attended these informative programs and actively participated, turning these initiatives into useful learning experiences. The Volunteers did not stop at these programs, a street play was organized by WGSMA and Syndicate Bank at Hiriadka. They

successfully transformed a seemingly intimidating duty into an interesting acquisition.



After the commendable efforts made by the volunteers, the Registrar, Mr. Narayana Sahabit, addressed everyone with an articulate speech on marching towards a 'less-cash' society. Student volunteers left no stone unturned as they took feedbacks by the people they trained to ensure an all-round implementation of the campaign. There were varied responses but the absolute success of this campaign can be comprehended from the fact that many other eager villages reached out to the volunteers, asking for similar awareness programs.

Currently, in India, computer literacy is about 6.5 %. The question is, will the attention of literacy shift from that of the rudimentary definition to a more functional (read: digital) one? If it does, will our country be able to catch up with the vast and interconnected web of interactive development.